

“Mammoths of the Wrangel Island”

“During the last glazierization, approximately 18,500 years ago Wrangel and Herald Islands were located in the middle of a dry land more than 1,000 km width, that connected Siberia and Alaska at that time. Vast iceboxes tied together the biggest part of ground water. As a result, the ocean level decreased by 183 meters. The dry, that land appeared after that, let the Paleolithic age hunters to move to the West to America, following the animals they were hunting.

The palaeoecology specialists call Bering landscapes of Pleistocene Period glazierization “the mammoths’ tundra steppe”. Complexes of steppe and tundra plants, covering Berengia of that time, were not similar to modern natural communities. Relatively rich flora provided numerous mammals with food. One can imagine vast expanses of Beringia dry land, the North variant of Serengeti of a kind, with wild horses, bisons, saigas, muflons. They were accompanied by ancient predators, such as sabre-toothed tigers, wolves, short-nosed bears and finally men, who were hunting them. The most wonderful of herbivores was the woolly mammoth.

The fossils, found on the Wrangel Island, show that a dwarf ecotype of mammoths originated there. They lived in these landscapes along with ancient horses, bisons, musk oxes and even woolly mammoths.

According to radiocarbon dating, dwarf mammoths lived in this territory only from 7,000 to 3,700 years ago, i.e. when Ancient Egyptian civilization already existed. Judging by the size of teeth, palaeoecology specialists suppose that this form of mammoths was 2 meters high, as opposed to typical mammoths of 3-3.3 meters high. Poor food resources and lack of predators in the Island are considered to be the main reasons for the appearance of dwarf ecotype. Dwarf mammoth isolated on the Island, outlived the ordinary one for almost 6,000 years.

Approximately 13,500 years ago the climate turned warmer, which led to ice caps melting and rise sea level. The biggest part of Bering dry land turned out to be flooded by the Bering and Chukchee seas. Wrangel and Herald Islands remained as isolated fragments of the disappeared Bering bridge.

With more snowy winters coming, sedge and moss replaced rich flora of mammoths’ steppes. Horses, antelopes, bisons and mammoths did not like these changes. All of them, including sabretooth tigers and short-nosed bears died one by one, becoming shadowy past.

(Booklet “The Wrangel Island”. Section “Brief Historical Experience”)